

**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee and its Public Health Subcommittee
Regarding the Governor's Proposed Budget for the Department of Public Health**

February 20, 2009

by Madeline McClave, Interim Executive Director, Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI)

I am writing on behalf of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), a diverse and broad-based coalition of individuals and organizations dedicated to improving awareness of and access to good oral health.

COHI urges you not to cut funding for Connecticut's school-based health centers. These centers are a very important point of access to comprehensive healthcare, including dental services, for many children. Because dental services for low-income adults in Connecticut are difficult to access, many parents do not initiate regular, preventive visits to the dental office for their children at an early age as they should to reduce the risk of dental disease and other problems.

Dental caries is an infectious disease caused by a bacteria (usually unknowingly transmitted from parents to very young children) that promotes dental disease and results in cavities. In our public health system, SBHCs are key in preventing and treating this infectious disease that can cause severe problems if allowed to progress unchecked.

School-based health center dental personnel educate children and their parents about caries and other oral health issues. They provide critical education and guidance to children to ensure that they adopt good, lifelong oral hygiene practices. These practices prevent most oral health problems and will save taxpayer and healthcare dollars down the road.

SBHCs and the dental services they provide prevent school absences, promote health education and prevent health issues among schoolchildren from developing into more painful and costly problems. Their preventive focus saves taxpayer and healthcare dollars.

Children face increased risks and pain due to poor access to oral health care. SBHCs reduce these risks including pain, suffering and disease, school absences and costly treatment.

- Oral health problems are responsible for more missed school days than any other type of health problem. Three out of 100 children miss school because of dental pain.¹
- Tooth decay disease is more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever in children. Tooth decay is the single most common chronic disease among children.²

Please consider the revenue generating strategies of the Better Choices for CT coalition before cutting these important services to so many vulnerable children that save money in the long run.

1. *Oral Health in America*, United States Surgeon General, 2001;

2. *Elements of Effective Action to Improve Oral Health & Access to Dental Care for Connecticut's Children and Families*, Children's Fund of Connecticut and Connecticut Health Foundation, 2001;